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Inmate workers get FEMA certified

The Prison Industry Authority has teamed up with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to facilitate an independent study program, newly introduced in June 2003. The program includes Hazardous Materials training courses, decision making/problem solving training and effective communication.

It is a self-study program in which inmate workers learn safety precautions about how to handle chemicals as well as how to dispose of them properly.

"The certification is an independent evaluation of knowledge," said Mike Colwell, prison industries administrator of the inmate employability program.

Colwell says that this specific certification creates a safer work environment within all 68 of the PIA factories.

So far, the FEMA program has certified 322 inmate workers and has proven to be a popular certification among male and female inmates.

"These certifications help mitigate difficulties inmates will face while on parole," said Colwell.

The supervisors of these programs are all PIA employees who work toward making sure that inmates are prepared for parole. Colwell said that the supervisors are dedicated employees who feel the program is a motivational tool as well as recognition of job skills.

In addition to the industry-

issued 525 internal certificates of proficiency for 1,500 hours of exceptional work.

To participate in the IEP program, inmates must have no adverse work related problems, must pass CDC tests, and be within three years of their release to parole.

The Prison Industry Authority's Inmate Employability Program has nine industry-based certifications and was introduced to the PIA in 2000.